Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/requiem0000humb

ca. 35/25 LPT £3

(from Bros. March 1930.)
A.J.K. Watson.

extra title
paper spine label tipped-in on
rear endpaper

Requiem

Other Books by the Same Author

Verse

LONDON SONNETS
SHYLOCK REASONS WITH MR. CHESTERTON
KENSINGTON GARDENS
THE UNKNOWN GODDESS
HUMORESQUE
VOLUME IN SIXPENNY SERIES OF AUGUSTAN POETS

Satire

LAMPOONS
NEWS OF THE DEVIL

Prose

CIRCULAR SAWS

REQUIEM

by Humbert Wolfe

London
Ernest Benn Limited

FOR
MY VISITOR
TO A ROOM
ON NO. 10
STAIRCASE
AT
WADHAM
COLLEGE,
AND
BECAUSE
OF
EVERYTHING

First published . . *April 1927*
Second impression . *May 1927*
Third impression . *May 1927*
Fourth impression . *June 1927*
Fifth impression . *August 1927*
Sixth impression *December 1927*

DEDICATION

THIS is your poem. I shall not write its fellow
earthsides of immortality. I sing
not here, as once, of love and his first swallow
that does not make, because it is, the spring.

Nor was it written as other poems were
because of human beauty and brief grace,
that with the bright assurance of a star
move in the heart to their predestined place,

as smoothly as the moon, and not less argent,
nor to the sun a hot allegiance lending,
but kindled of themselves with man's insurgent
claim that the seal of beauty is its ending.

It was not mine to make, but as the pool
they called Bethesda, when the angel stirred it,
was with some alien virtue wonderful,
so this was written, as though I overheard it

whispered beyond the misted curtains, screening
this world from that, so faint and yet so lit
with flame from far, that life itself was leaning
back, like a runner storming into it.

The moment passed; it is not given to men
to overtake those echoes with a word.
I am as sure they will not come again,
as I am certain they were overheard.

But what they were I can no longer guess,
nor know if anywhere in this a sign
remains of that inhuman loveliness.
I only know this poem is not mine.

A VERY few of these poems have appeared before. For permission to republish thanks are due to the *New Statesman*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly* and the Bermondsey Bookshop.

CONTENTS

THE LOSERS

page

THE COMMON MAN

The Common Man: I 17
The Common Man: II 18

THE COMMON WOMAN

The Common Woman: I 21
The Common Woman: II 22

THE SOLDIER

The Soldier: I 27
The Soldier: II 28

THE HARLOT

The Harlot: I 31
The Harlot: II 32

THE HUCKSTER

The Huckster: I 38
The Huckster: II 40

THE NUN

The Nun: I 43
The Nun: II 45

THE ANARCHIST

The Anarchist: I 51
The Anarchist: II 52

THE RESPECTABLE WOMAN

The Respectable Woman: I 56
The Respectable Woman: II 58

THE WINNERS

THE LOVERS. HE

The Lovers. He: I 65
The Lovers. He: II 67
The Lovers. He: III 69

CONTENTS

page

THE LOVERS. SHE

The Lovers. She : I 72
The Lovers. She : II 73
The Lovers. She : III 74

THE BUILDER

The Builder : I 79
The Builder : II 81
The Builder : III 82

THE TEACHER

The Teacher : I 85
The Teacher : II 86

THE SAINTS. HE

The Saint. He : I 92
The Saint. He : II 93

THE SAINTS. SHE

The Saint. She : I 96
The Saint. She : II 97

THE UNCOMMON MAN

The Uncommon Man : I 104
The Uncommon Man : II 105

THE UNCOMMON WOMAN

The Uncommon Woman : I 109
The Uncommon Woman : II 110

LOSERS AND WINNERS 113

CODA

The High Song is Over 123

THE LOSERS

THE COMMON MAN
I
II
THE COMMON WOMAN
I
II

WHAT WAS life to me, now that I'm done with it?
(Lucifer, who fell with Adam, and Azrael,
who took his place in heaven, being lit
with the dark flames, whose plume is black in Hell,
Listen and save!
when that pale spirit calls you from his nameless
grave.)

On a grey day, when the clouds were thin and long,
I was born weeping aloud, and she who bore me,
the innocent malefactor of my great wrong,
could not relieve my load, nor move the judges for me,
those who condemn
men to life's servitude, and none may plead with
them.

Small wit I had, and the world went wailing by me,
and youth was a little lantern (Listen and save!
Lucifer, who fell with Adam!) and love stood nigh
me,
but what I had of his wonder I do not have,
here, all alone,
unloved, unlit with lamps, forgotten, and unknown.

What could I do but suffer, as all men must,
and set my mortal heart against the heart of Hell,
whose soft great beat dissolves our trembling dust,
as a jar shudders with music (Azrael,
Listen!) and still
I matched against the will of death my human will.

I, as the small red insect, dying, builds the dry land
out of the sea, I, merely by living, laid
a grain of a grain on that increasing island,
that not of the heroes, but of us is made,
who did not dare,
dying, even to guess that we were dying there.

And proud that island as an Archangel
rises, when the roaring seas of life are lit
with the dark flames, whose plume is black in Hell,
and this was my life, and thus I wrought with it.
(Listen and tell!
Lucifer, who fell with Adam, and Azrael!)

THE COMMON MAN

I

I AM the star, that stole the dawn, and died
with my bright theft, consumed like Semele,
yet in the flame of my burning I denied
the darkness of God, and men were lit with me.
I am Prometheus, that drew the fiery tide
of knowledge with the moon of my agony,
but in my chains, and the vulture tearing my side,
men learned that they must suffer to be free.
Twice have I fallen from heaven, suffered twice
immeasurable pangs that men may rule
in unmalicious godhead on the calm hill.
And if the third time I must pay the price
of the world's torment to be beautiful,
type of man's unassuageable heart, I will.

II

WHO WITHOUT darkness could imagine light,
and, were he shadowless, how could the sun
flaunt his gold domino by maskéd night,
or anything be vivid if all were one!
For those who see, without the need of sight,
I, Azrael, am the darker stars that spun
about creating God by their own flight,
giving no radiance, and asking none.
While the lit stars of morning sang together,
swung out on their own orbit quietly
my stars, for all their silence, statelier,
and, brightest thou! who plucked the dawn, my brother,
in the moment of falling from heaven didst not see
I was the dawn you stole, pale Lucifer!

My hands are empty now at the end of it
(Lucifer, who fell with Adam, and Azrael,
who took his place in heaven, being lit
with the dark flames, whose plume is black in Hell,
and you, pale Mary,
see her poor hands how they are spoiled, her feet how
weary!)

They gave me a little beauty, and a man used it
as a screen to hide the love he dared not know,
a love of God, but the love of man confused it,
a love of children, and I saw them go
helpless and young
into the same dim agony with which my heart was
wrung.

Little I understood, and all I learnt
was how life passes without hope or warning,
and to pray for night before the day was burnt,
and in the night to pray would it were morning,
and how to seem
a proud walker in life, when creeping in a dream.

What could I do but suffer, as is the fate
of women, and as a woman take my share
in the long litany we dedicate
to man and to his future that we bear,
and still pretend
that that begins for ever, when we end?

(Mary, who, having much, had this more given—
to build with the pains of birth and the deep Hell
of Death, decreed before the stars, a heaven,
wherein proud Lucifer and prouder Azrael
at last are one,
because there is neither life nor death in the Son,

who died that death might be defeated, living
to make an end of life, you, Ashtaroth,
and Mary, the greater Queen, are you forgiving
this common woman, who forgives you both,
in your high heaven,
this common woman, who has suffered, and forgiven?)

My failure was too wan to be disaster,
too pitiful for tragedy to clothe.
I listened all my days for love the master
of life, and in the end was starved of both,
and yet my will
that sought, and could not find them, is about them still.

I listened for their voice, and was too near them
in youth, too far in age to hear, and yet
because I listened other hearts will hear them,
because I was forgot will not forget,
because I falter
the flame, I did not see, burns on the unseen altar.

I

I COULD have made love for them so they basked,
as children playing in gardens, where the herb
with the lazy lightning of blossom is dusked
and lit, and there's nothing to hurt or disturb.
Or like Beatrice that Dante only asked
to stay in his memory, cold and superb,
as when she passed him tall and deeply masked,
with no heart of her own to ache with, or curb.
But the old dark roots of the tree Ygdrasil
would have plunged through the flimsy earth, and blazed with
the wild green leafage of irremediable love,
and the hurt they suffered had been more, not less ill,
when the sleepy soil had been torn, and amazed with
the floral passion I had not warned them of.

II

ASHTAROTH, you poor goddess, set your doves free!
Here are new wings and lovelier, since those drew
your car all pearls, and when the laughing sea
was green as grass in a long avenue.
But now, the deep waters murmur differently,
since other Feet have blessed them, crying through
the world and all the beaches, "Victory."
Nor even the lilied wave remembers you.
And Pan, your other shape, (have you not heard?)
followed the Kings, piping, to the low manger,
but the door was shut, and, quiet as a moth,
he stole away. Nor flock nor shepherd stirred,
when he, once king of shepherds, now a stranger,
played the farewell to Pan and Ashtaroth.

THE SOLDIER
I
II
THE HARLOT
I
II

MICHAEL! behold night's long black pools are drinking
the blood-red sun, that through her marshes silts,
and, though in reddened slime my feet are sinking,
I lift up the sword of my spirit. Kiss the hilts,
and say to death,
"Though you forget my soldier, God remembereth."

For to have fought is better than to have refused
in a wrong cause, or for no cause at all,
and, though the blade be shattered, it was used
in the command of that grey general,
whose one reward
to soldiers, having used them, is to break their sword.

(Lucifer, who fell with Adam, and afterward
through cycle after flaming epicycle
lead your doomed armies, here is one more sword
to share that doom, and you, remember, Michael,
you cannot shame us
who, failing, cry "te morituri salutamus."

Gladiators, knowing that our agony at most
is an interlude in some strange festival,
where the cold spectators watch the chosen ghost
strive, fall, and die, and then forget it all;
and yet we come
shining to the arena, nor beg the lifted thumb.)

What is as foul as war, that changes even
courage—the soldier's redemption—into lust,
and smears the very patterns laid up in heaven
with the crawling inattention of the dust,—
foul, foul, foul, foul
great spaces where the winds of futility howl,

in darkness, in the decay of all things holy,
in the broken light of a black star, and still
the blind rose of the spirit, oh how slowly!
from age to age sweetens in the secret will,
as clear of Dis
as over the trenches a storm-cock's litanies.
Listen!

A Thrush in the Trenches

Suddenly he sang across the trenches,
vivid in the fleeting hush
as a star-shell through the smashed black branches,
a more than English thrush.

Suddenly he sang, and those who listened
nor moved nor wondered, but
heard, all bewitched, the sweet unhastened
crystal Magnificat.

One crouched, a muddied rifle clasping,
and one a filled grenade,
but little cared they, while he went lisping
the one clear tune he had.

Paused horror, hate and Hell a moment,
(you could almost hear the sigh)
and still he sang to them, and so went
(suddenly) singing by.

Suddenly singing—and thus, out of hate and horror,
the greater impulse than those that it can move by
shakes itself free, and death becomes a mirror,
held up by angels, for man to see God's love by,
and this we were,
and, thus we challenge you, Michael, says the soldier.

I

Down some cold field in a world unspoken
the young men are walking together, slim and tall,
and though they laugh to one another, silence is not broken:
there is no sound however clear they call.

They are speaking together of what they loved in vain here,
but the air is too thin to carry the thing they say.
They were young and golden, but they came on pain here,
and their youth is age now, their gold is grey.

Yet their hearts are not changed, and they cry to one another,
"What have they done with the lives we laid aside?
Are they young with our youth, gold with our gold, my brother?
Do they smile in the face of death, because we died?"

Down some cold field in a world uncharted
the young seek each other with questioning eyes.
They question each other, the young, the golden-hearted,
of the world that they were robbed of in their quiet Paradise.

II

I DO not ask God's purpose. He gave me the sword,
and though merely to wield it is itself the lie
against the light, at the bidding of my Lord,
where all the rest bear witness, I'll deny.
And I remember Peter's high reward,
and say of soldiers, when I hear cocks cry,
" As your dear lives ('twas all you might afford)
you laid aside, I lay my sainthood by."
There are in heaven other archangels,
bright friends of God, who build where Michael destroys,
in music, or in beauty, lute-players.
I wield the sword; and, though I ask naught else
of God, I pray to Him: " But these were boys,
and died. Be gentle, God, to soldiers."

(LUCIFER, who fell with Adam and Azrael,
and Mary, who, having much, had this more given—
to build with the pains of birth and the deep Hell
of Death, decreed before the stars, a heaven
are you forgiven,
dare you forgive this woman, in that high heaven?)

I did not understand. As in a mist
dull shapes loomed, threatened, towered over me,
and passed, while still about me, twist by twist,
the loose wraiths rolled, too thin to cover me,
but cold enough
to strangle all that youth and hope and love are
fashioned of.

I did not understand. For my love came to me
as to the rest, and light and heat and scent with him,
and in the dusk life spoke his golden name to me,
and whispered "Follow," and I turned and went
with him,
and never knew
what it was that I did, that others did not do.

I did not understand. (You, Magdalene,
rather this head anoint with spikenard
than His, that all the oil of the world could not wean
from that which lay before Him, and though 'twere
hard
to leave Him, think
she also has a bitter cup—your cup—to drink.)

I did not understand. I dreamed that I dreamed
of kisses that did not kiss, of hands not hands
but fishes at my throat, and that the world seemed
like tainted water about deserted lands
to the dead hum
of heavy-spotted insects swaying its slow scum.

I did not understand. Under wan trees
at night on muted feet dark figures came
—stale painted lusts, like naked savages—
that worshipped a pale idol in my name,
and the dead sea
stole, as they danced, across the beaches quietly.

I did not understand. For with the dawn
the beach was empty, and slowly with the tidal
drag of the deep the lagging waters were drawn
into cleanness, and only a broken idol
lay, still and small,
watching the unintelligible end of all.

I did not understand. I once was clean,
unstained and young, played in a world unbarred,
and thus was trapped with death. (You, Magdalene,
rather this head anoint with spikenard,
and with your hand
make smooth the puzzled brow that did not understand.)

THE HARLOT

I

STRIPED with fierce wales of sunlight the brown idol
gapes nonchalantly through disfeatured eyes,
while round his trunk bursts in green foam the tidal
wave of hot creeping plant-obscenities.

He is as blank as those who worship, dumb
as their dark minds, and does not care, nor know,
when the black chuckle, rubbed across the drum,
drifts down as palpable as evil snow.

He is the image of their emptiness,
the carvéd metaphor of minds untaught,
guessing, as we as pitifully guess
at God, and bringing Him, like us, to naught.

And, while the victim flounders at his knees,
the nameless god, to whom is sacrificed
the tortured blindness of the savage, sees
beyond this tumult the slow tears of Christ.

II

All the world over in every town and city
there is a furtive shuffle of tired feet,
and the invisible hounds that know not pity
pad after them in alley-way and street.
All men are whippers-in of that foul pack,
and follow them to life's supreme disaster
as certainly as if you heard them crack
the huntsman's whip, or halloa like the Master.
Their sin is all our sin, ours is their shame,
and while a single woman earns her bread
by blasphemy committed in love's name
not only she, but all our world, is dead.
Then God call off the hounds, and bid the whore,
and all who made her, go and sin no more!

THE HUCKSTER
I
II
THE NUN
I
II

THE WINDS toss up. Prowling beyond the bar
smooth-muscled leopards with the foam's white roses
stippled, the waves are hunting, and no star
lights the wild jungle, whose green anger closes
behind and round
the ship, that into darkness crashes with one bound.

We trade for profit, and if fools pretend
we waste our lives for gold, what was the quest
that launched the Argo? For what other end
were ever sails set, wearing to the West?
What other thirst
than this drew all adventurers from the first?

Say it be true that, when the journey's done,
we are old men with nothing but our scars
to show for all the dangers we have run,
still we have seen the menace of the stars,
have proved our faith
with the last testimony of encountered death.

Or if we win great riches, and our touch
holds before beauty's face the golden mask
as in the ancient tragedies, this much
at least of fortune we have dared to ask,
and have her boon,
that, if we lived too long, we cannot die too soon.

And if adventure hardens down to theft,
if the sly huckster creep along the blood
closing upon the heart, and naught is left
but pirate-galleys rotting in the mud,
and for all these pains
the tattered scarecrows of youth, that dangle on the chains,

If, masters of the world, we nothing knew,
made naught but misery, left naught behind,
deaf when compassion spoke her shining cue,
and when love touched our eyelids we were blind,
if life that cried, as
a bird, was slowly choked with the gold grain of Midas,

Are we to blame? or life the sorceress,
who with a single potion can pervert
the desire for action into beastliness,
the golden shadow into common dirt,
and blurs the fine
boundary, that separates the angel from the swine?

(Who of the huckster is the archangel?
Will none plead for him? None advance his case?
Who not with Lucifer from heaven fell,
nor in the dark of Azrael keeps his place,
but who would sell
the angel of light to heaven, of dark to Hell.

Is there no archangel? No spirit lief
to lean from heaven and lay his hands on them?
None? but bright choir was there not a thief
who had his hour in Jerusalem—
the thief who won
[will you give less] upon the Cross his absolution?)

Are we to blame if in Calypso's isle
our very virtues are to magic bent?
or if the first long visions that beguile
the heart of youth become our punishment?
We are the same
though thus transformed by devils. Are we to blame?

I

"TAKE back my thirty pieces
of silver," the merchant said.
"Now that my wealth increases,
I would have quiet instead.

"The pieces that you paid me
I put at interest,
even as my master bade me,
but quiet is best.

"Another might have spent it
on pleasure, wine or maid.
I only used or lent it
all in the way of trade.

"But now, that I fail and tire,
I see my duty plain;
I have but one desire,
to give it back again.

"You tell me it was bartered
for a soul, and you decline?
But if a soul was martyred,
high priest, the soul was mine.

"My soul it was I offered,
my heart it was I paid,
and I it was who suffered,
myself who was betrayed.

" You are the priests. The stuff is
there in the temple! So,
since comfort is your office,
take it, and let me go.

" Take it—for if I erred then,
have you not also erred?
and if I spoke a word then,
who bade me speak the word?

" You are the priests. Forgive me!
I know not what I do.
Nay, tell your men to leave me!
and listen! this is true—

" Last night I saw a felon
hanging, his face all black
with birds, and one great talon—
For God's sake take it back! "

II

THERE were thirteen that ate together, drinking
strange wine, and biting on a perilous bread.
And one was speaking, and the rest were thinking
more of his eyes than of the things he said.
They were dark eyes, and in their deep was swaying
a mote of gold, that lit upon the word
subtly, as though the light in them were saying
what, though unspoken, all, who listened, heard.
Most willingly they were caught in the gold strand
that bound their hearts only to set them free,
save one, who heard, but would not understand,
afraid of blindness, if he dared to see.
But even so there was a ray of light
went out with him into the fatal night.

THE NUN

THERE is a pool in the convent garden. Still is
the amber basin, where no fishes leap,
but slowly cruise between the water-lilies
in sleepy gold, as those in silver sleep—
sleep on and on,
their sleep itself a quiet breathing orison.

In spring, like four tall monks, the cypresses
fold their dark green about their cloistral boughs,
while the young birches, those most human trees,
so sheltered, take their first and silver vows,
and flowers swing
their coloured censers in fragrance softly opening.

There is small noise of wind behind these walls,
nor any human echo save bells sobbing,
whose normal cadence actually falls
upon the pool, and sets the water throbbing
with the far sense
of some angelic trouble, some healing difference.

Pool of my heart! Not always was thy cup
guarded from the wind as now, as now unstirred,
nor did the water-flowers drifting up
spread their green plumage like a floating bird,
nor naught disturb
with any flash of fin the lilies' trailing herb.

But passion deeply moving, loss and terror,
anger and sorrow, turpitude and blame,

changed all, and what was made to be a mirror
for unassuming loveliness became
of shapes, that pass
in dark, a broken and tumultuous looking-glass.

Thus tarnishing with rust the silent mere
beyond the world, whose stainless waters draw
from the small pools the saints establish here
in passionless obedience to the law,
that says " Refuse!
What we denied remains, but what we had we lose."

(Dear Saint Teresa! who laid the world aside
before the world had spoken, will you bless
after such pain this all-but-virgin bride
of Christ, who will not be His lover less
because she shared
the enchanting agony of love, that you were spared?

Will you not take her softly by the hand,
nor tell her that she sacrificed in vain
for music, that she did not understand,
the lovely human counterpoint of pain,
whose echoes faint
are grace-notes in the full acceptance of the saint?)

It is very quiet in the garden. Slowly
the oleanders let their roses fold.
The shadows reach my feet, and all the holy
precincts of evening are suddenly cold.
Sweet Christ! a nun
lies down to sleep, and for the last time rejects the sun.

THE NUN

I

In the garden of my Father
there is a lilac-tree,
and the fowls of heaven gather
from all the world for me,

the quail He sent to Moses,
Elijah's ravens, and,
all white between the roses,
in worship's Holy Land,

when the lilac-tree is bending
beneath the weight of love,
I have heard wings descending,
but dared not see the Dove.

I will walk alone in the Garden
in which my soul has cried,
"God! if you cannot pardon
the world I laid aside,

and if by having strayed there,
and loved it, while I strayed,
My Master was betrayed there,
I also was betrayed."

And, while the fowls of heaven
between the branches gather,
though I am unforgiven
I will whisper to my Father:

" Last night, when I was waking,
I saw the bitter Rood,
and One upon it breaking
His heart in solitude.

" Dear God, my heart was shaken,
and in the utter black
I heard Him cry ' Forsaken '—
For Christ's sake take me back."

II

Outside the corn is unto harvest yellow,
outside the first blue clusters change the vine,
but in this reticence my heart lies fallow,
waiting for other bread, and holier wine.
My soil is barren, but with fasting and sorrow
enriched I will prepare it for the plough,
knowing the shares can only drive the furrow
deeply and straight if I am patient now.
I will refuse to share life's easy rain
that falls alike on evil and on good.
I will deny the sun's diurnal stain
on truth's immaculate beatitude.
And I shall know that love and all delight
are silver tares the moon has sown by night.

THE ANARCHIST
I
II
THE RESPECTABLE WOMAN
I
II

THE ANARCHIST

SALUTE to Nature, the first anarchist,
whose bombs of green explode the fertile spring,
and hurl the heats of summer with a twist
like poison-gas that, slowly filtering,
on shred and splinter
of the bombarded lines of autumn clamps the winter.

She has no law, but wastes the myriad spawn
to hatch a single fish, in grim bravado
builds trees whose emerald lace by time is drawn
into secular beauty, and with one tornado
crashes and sears
the intolerable patience of the designing years.

She has one impulse only—to create
in order to destroy in wilfulness,
and if she has a secret, it is hate
of all the cringing armaments of " yes "
that scatter and blow
at the careless onset of her eternal " no."

That is the freedom I demand for man—
no king, no law, no guide, no love, no God,
life with no purpose, death that has no plan,
contempt the axe, and nescience the rod
with which we crack
out of life's black oppression into further black.

We shall not be deceived if we forestall
the laughter of the uncreated rabble,
who mock us with the phantom of the Fall,
the ghost of resurrection, and the bright babble
of man restored
by his own guess at some fear-generated Lord.

(You to whom men in Athens sacrificed—
the Unknown God, because unknowable,
—an older Mithras and a darker Christ—
release these disenchanted from the spell,
who cannot be
comforted by all imagination's wizardry.

Give them enchantment. Let them know again
the puzzled happiness of blindness humbled,
and let them cry like your Athenians, when
Paul broke the altar, and the statue tumbled,
" Though thus deceived,
blessed are we who did not know, yet have not disbelieved.")

We will be ourselves, and when the devil in us
cries loudly " I am God," we shall reply,
" There is no God, save your own voice within us,
the tired echo of death that, drifting by,
pauses to write
with ultimate indifference, 'Let there be night.' "

THE ANARCHIST

I

YES, POPPIES, I understand your red.
You are protesting against death and dulness.
You are shouting (and they hear not), "Dead, dead, dead,"
in a huge unsensitive stillness.

The black earth and the dull black people
are no more than meaningless substantives,
a worn lesson-book for a blind cripple,
but your colour is clear print and it lives.

Red caps of liberty among slaves,
wild daughters of the revolution,
your flag of crimson suddenly waves
over the Bastille of nation after nation.

You are crying aloud to us, "Anguish and freedom,"
and there are not ten just men found to heed you.
You are fire from heaven falling on Sodom!
Burn all the cities of the world, poppies! They need you.

II

BUT I will not be cheated of freedom. No!
I will walk along the black and barren street,
and see the small distorted people go,
and hear how thin a city's heart can beat.
I will justify destruction by the pains
all men are born to suffer. I will prove
that of all life's intolerable chains
the last that man must shatter will be love.
I will plumb the deepest Hell that man has known,
and find in agony the perfect hater,
who proudly claims damnation for his own,
and uses it to damn his dark Creator,
and watch creation choking in the mist
of God, the universal anarchist.

THE RESPECTABLE WOMAN

IT SHOULD have been easy to die moderately,
having lived without excess. To escape the extreme
experience of Death's command to see,
beyond these modified tones, the single beam
whose flagrant knife
slashes into aching fragments the pattern of life.

What was my pattern? If I worked in wool
the crimson silks of vision, love's gold lace,
subduing what was strange and beautiful
to the grey shadow of my stooping face,
yet none the less
that was the steady shadow cast by godliness.

Is there no virtue in bearing down the threat
of the jungle moving faintly in the blood,
and the smooth velvet footsteps, and the wet
muzzles of creatures, stirring in the mud,
and the hot breath
that men called freedom to live, and I called death?

There were high names, but I was not deceived.
I saw the beast beneath the shifting cloak.
Was I not blessed, who saw and disbelieved,
who, when all else went singing, never spoke,
but shut my eyes
against the baits of knowledge and freedom's glittering lies?

Women there were who sinned, and these I turned
from,
and men who claimed to set creation free
by changing all the laws that men have learned from
God and their own unchanging history,
women and men
who were the devil, leading back his own again.

They came with music, and with roses, trailing
their beautiful damnation, and the victim
that listened woke to find the rapture failing
in the flushed instant, when its beauty tricked him,
but I, who saw
the cloven hoof of loveliness, upheld the law.

I stood for unflinching ignorance, and man's duty
to do in darkness God's obscure command,
and thrusting by intelligible beauty
I followed what I could not understand,
because I knew
that that alone which passes understanding must be
true.

(Martha! who found in service the better part,
these are your sisters. These, like you, preferred
hearing the little whisper of the heart,
some colder admonition that they heard,
and sacrificed
for that bleak satisfaction, even Christ.

And, therefore, Martha, since they too were jealous
of love rewarded by the Source of love,
is there no word He spoke that you can tell us,
or even an unrecorded smile to prove
they shall not starve
in heaven, on earth who only stand and serve?)

But death comes suddenly with a great wind,
stripping the spirit naked to the light,
and I must suffer not less than those who sinned
the exposure that I gave my life to fight,
and yet I know
I did not err, though God Himself should tell me so.

THE RESPECTABLE WOMAN

I

They are singing, but I have not listened
in the open spaces in spring.
Their white feet in the dances have hastened,
but mine are not hastening.

They have loosed their hair that is golder
than laburnum's gold in May,
and the birch in the rain is their shoulder—
but I have looked away.

They have bound their breasts with rushes,
they have dived in the forest lake,
but the foot of the satyr crushes
the lilied reeds in the brake.

The sound of a flute drifts over,
(but I have closed my ears)
and the air is sweet with the lover,
and the cry of the fugitive years.

I have not heard nor seen them,
I have not danced nor sung,
and when love passed between them
he left my heart unwrung.

They have wasted their lives by spending,
and are with death rewarded,
but I shall find no ending
of the life that I have hoarded.

I saved the source of living,
Thou knowest at what cost,
and, therefore, All-forgiving,
now give me what I lost!

II

It is a common lie—who would believe it?—
that, as men lose their beauty, the slow earth
does in her tranquil motherhood re-weave it
into a bird—into a flower-birth.
It is not true. The earth has no such power.
But spring to spring is hostile; summer saith,
"Was there another summer?"; bird and flower
have nothing half so lovely as their death.
And if men say no drop in rapture's cup
but is some beauty known, and re-engendered
now, as hereafter, for the millionth time,
remember lost Atlantis silted up,
and crawling seas between the beauties squandered
of gods face downwards in the ocean slime.

THE WINNERS

THE LOVERS. HE
I
II
III
THE LOVERS. SHE
I
II
III

HE

THUS it began. On a cool and whispering eve,
when there was quiet in my heart, she came,
and there was an end of quiet. I believe
that a star trembled when she breathed my name,
and, when I spoke,
not in our East ascending, a dawn broke.

There was a colour beyond the mortal prism,
a light, with darkness, as its minor third,
fragrance, as though an everlasting chrism
too subtle for sense, were spoken in a word,
not in our speech,
but colour, light and fragrance answering each to each.

(Lucifer, who fell with Adam and Azrael,
Mary, who, having much, had this more given,
Michael and Mary Magdalene, if Hell
saw some bronze dawn the parapets of heaven,
intolerably far,
and bright, and unattainable, so love's one star,

seen from the abyss of smoking life, and you
Krishna, or Balder, or some older name
for the unimaginable beauty breaking through
the tossing veils of vision, this is the same
beauty that died,
and rose again, when the world's heart was crucified.)

Say that love passes, crying in a mist,
say that I failed her, say that, being this,
even at the high moment of love's Eucharist
I bartered my starry birthright for a kiss,
and when she bent
her bright and serving head, betrayed her sacrament.

Yet she forgave me, yet with the star she strove,
saying, " Dear star, rather than he should blame
his treason, I will fashion with my love
some lesser star, and call it by your name,
and, though I lose you,
if there must be a choice, dear star, I cannot choose
you."

So she stepped down, out of her natal splendour,
to comfort me, and saw the great light dwindle,
but, at the dark horizons of surrender,
now, at the end, I see the star rekindle,
and, dying, know
there was no star but she, nor will be, where I go.

HE

I

ROMANCE? Has she escaped? But, wait!
  Surely that goat-boy heard
a step as undeliberate
  and swift, as the low word

spoken by the beloved, and, wheeling
  suddenly to the height,
he watched illumination stealing
  the very source of sight.

Look at his eyes. They do not heed us,
  enchanted and forsaken,
but their bright misery may lead us
  upon the path that she has taken.

She touched his eyelids with a morning
  that left him beautiful and blind
to be a promise, and a warning
  of what we too may find.

So into noon between the firs
  climb where no shadow moves,
and learn that the forest-lawns are hers
  (but their silences are love's).

Climb on! (and does he watch in twilight
  the goatherd, where he lies,
the actual stars mislead the shy light
  abandoned in his eyes?)

Climb on, and find a mountain-inn,
and, while he sleeps, the noise
of rain on the roof is a violin
quietly tuned to your voice.

Your voice, in which day's shadows creep
warm, perfumed, intimate
with drowsy words that fall asleep
of their own weight.

And, last of all, when you are sinking
into quiet, and only your eyes
glimmer, like that lost torch-boy linking
his unknown Paradise,

and you stretch your negligent fingers, wooing
beauty into her trance,
then all our life, that was vainly pursuing,
like his, becomes romance.

HE

II

No! DO not speak! It is better to stand so
in air as palpable as water about us
with lips close-shut lest it should drown us. No!
we need not speak, since this had never been without us.

It is your hand in mine that has lit the lake,
a bowl with a lamp shining through alabaster,
a bowl some Ganymede has lifted to slake
the thirst divine of his tall white mountain-master.

It is your still gold head, in the wave of the wind
like a Naiad's head, that makes the great mountains dress
their spears at the salute. A thought in your mind
tumbled on the autumn trees their sunset loveliness.

It is because you stand remote above
the beauty of the world you are making, slender
as the slim reed at the young lips of love,
that Time has broken his sword and the years surrender.

It is because you have leaned a little toward me,
not as a lover, but as the holier part
of the poet's mind, that this fugitive ecstasy
outpaces even what the heart can say to the heart.

For love has but two notes, and those notes shake
beyond themselves from the heard to the unheard
note,
and so fall back. And in dark the lovers wake,
but we shall not wake in dark, for this is the third
note.

HE

III

I AM the fiddler. Ere the world began
I had two notes, and only two. The one
with tumbled sunflakes dripping, I called man,
the second had no name and needed none.
I am the fiddler. Like a golden fan
I folded the long feathers I had spun,
and, as I folded them, a shadow ran,
silver, between the music and the sun.
I threw my bow over the stars, and no man
remembered Krishna, but, till the world is done,
there are but these two notes, a single tune,—
man, that I named before the world, and woman,
so named when she redeemed the fallen sun
with the vicarious silver of the moon.

SHE

LISTEN! The world was quiet when he came,
and the clear moon, turning to glass the air,
could hardly pierce it with her argent flame,
but hung, in cool suspension, mirrored there,
but when he spoke
the glass of the moon was in his voice, and the glass
broke.

Broke—and some splinter cut away the net,
in which a singing lark had been snared, and she,
afraid of her own wings, would not rise yet,
but hid in my heart a moment, swayingly,
while far above
there was a high star drew this little star to love—

love in his moment, that does not ask or give,
love in his moment uncompassionate,
love, that is a death, in which the lovers live
between the mortal and the immortal state,
than death no less
love that knows unimaginable loneliness.

And still she hid—my lark—(and who can tell
what is the lovely threat and terror of wings
for all who fly?) but, suddenly, she fell
clean into heaven out of all these things,
and as she tumbled
the long beam of her singing in the moonlight
trembled.

(Psyche, do you remember the wings beating,
and all the little earth that fell so far,
when you, all wingless, through the midnight fleeting,
woke among wings upon an alien star,
unknown, untrod,
and, turning to your lover, knew him for a god?

Psyche, if you remember this, remember
how long the first flight is, the woman how waking,
in what wild world unguessed, after what slumber,
with the heart crying and the wings how aching,
remember these
lonely, between the kisses, and love's long silences

And then remember how through all sorrow after,
weeping, and the slow mitigation of the flight,
still some clear echo of the lark's high laughter
sounds, and wings beating upward through the night,
upward and out
to where the straight trumpets are calling, and the
gold stars shout.)

I chose between my soul and him—no choice
since he became my soul, and, dying, know
that, though all voices fade in love's one voice,
and all but this are silent where I go,
the path I trod,
alone, was lonely with the loneliness of God.

SHE

I

YES, THEY will give me there
all that I missed here.
Ah! but I shall not know
lips that I kissed here.
Coldly the harp of silver,
coldly, how cold,
the harpist will stroke the great
harp of gold—
cool, grave, immaculate
notes, but how graver
than life's small cadences
hushed there for ever,
how in their absolute
counterpoint less to me
than love's voice breaking on
his fugitive "Yes" to me,
than love's voice changing from
a sob to a dumb thing,
but in the silences
plucking on something
the shade of things mortal, a
butterfly's trace on
God's inconceivable
diapason.

SHE

II

I WAS not envious of beauty in your verse,
save when your own, being mortal, fell below it,
nor asked Euterpe aught of what was hers,
save when she robbed the man to crown the poet.

Ah! I was proud as she when with a mouthful
of words you changed men's hearts, and with a tune
turned the dull North of hatreds into a South full
of love, and the first nightingale beneath the moon.

Ah! I was proud as she, where silence lay dense
as mist on all those waiting for the spring
in the hollow centuries, when your bright cadence
flashed like a torch, like a gold swallow's wing.

Ah! I was proud, but what you did for these
the living, and the unborn, could you not do
for yourself also? bring that shining peace
to your wild heart? not save your own love too?

O dear vicarious lover, with your head bowed,
holding the crown high above foreheads unknown,
sealing their love and peace, ah! I was proud,
prouder than Euterpe, poet—and alone.

SHE

III

THE GREAT Italian made his statues wear
the rhythm of his mind as absolute
as though he poured the metal like an air
along the cool obedience of a flute.
And yet when all was finished, on the smooth
of bronze or marble side some alien glow
descended with the menace of a truth,
that baffled even Michael Angelo.
So love, though shaped to follow perfectly
the ultimate vision men and women spend
for that brief peace at the flame's heart, goes free
by some strange light their passion could not lend.
Love is greater than the lovers. Love is such
that all may love, and fail, and yet be rich.

THE BUILDER
I
II
III
THE TEACHER
I
II

SPACE is a thin black fog that coils and smokes
with long loose-lipped defiance, but we pack it
into the stuff of vision, whose golden strokes
tear at the formless void until they crack it,
and in the brain
burst into pattern's unimaginable pain.

Arches thrust out like the back of a maddened horse,
braced as with striving hoofs at emptiness,
the lunge of the sheer stone with the white force
of fire pouring upward into space,
the meteor shower
in traceries transfixed, and the unquestionable
tower.

Or blocks, head-downwards into rivers stamped,
drowned in the mud and holding, though they drown,
while on their suffocating valiance clamped
vast girders leap, so that you feel the frown
of frozen flight,
and almost hear the groan of wings that fail to bite.

There is one splendour of vision, another glory,
different and less, of the vision consummate
snatched from the void in steeple and clerestory
and the tall iron irresolutely great,
the builder's tale
of all the strivings of men that thus divinely fail.

(Lucifer, that fell from heaven, and Azrael—
space in triumphant darkness—you were lit
even with the burning of pinions as they fell,
each bound for ever to his opposite—
type of man's soul
divided thus for ever, thus for ever whole.

And though you fell, pale angel, it is thus
you hung the unappeasable stars to mark
the long way back that climbs for all of us
untrodden and enchanted through the dark,
and all our pride
is that the desire of the heart is never satisfied.)

The desire remains. So let the builder go,
whose work is only to kindle it anew.
The desire remains for beauty they did not know,
they failed and builded better than they knew,
who failing wind
the secret slug-horn at the ramparts of the mind.

Childe Rolande is at the gate. The paynim gloom
grapples his throat, but still he sounds again
man's last rejoinder that, outfacing doom,
awakes the startled hosts of Charlemagne
crying in the night
"The heathen dark has wrong, Christians have right."[1]

I

THEORIES of Art! Believe me, they're no theories!
To know yourself, to clutch what now and here is
and set it down for yourself—that's all there is
in all that chatter about mysteries!
Take my Gioconda (Mind! the paint is wet,
And stand well back! She isn't finished yet!)
What made me paint her just like that, d'you think?
Shade, line and colour! Fools to waste their ink!
All that is in it—that's the stuff of the trade,
as a man of bone and flesh is moulded and made.
Yes, but does God stop there? Does He design
this as an exercise in colour and line
and rest content with that? And dust His thumb
as though He'd finished working out a sum!
In His own image He makes us—meaning He
creates each soul with separate agony,
tearing it out of His own—and using flesh
(as I, as anyone, might use his brush)
to set His mind free of a thought that stung Him
into creation. What d'you say? I wrong Him
to speak of Him in human terms. How else
can we speak of Him? Of all miracles
the greatest is that a man understands
God in the godhead of his shaping hands
when he moves them blindly, when he gropes, he grips,
and the thrill of life cracks through his finger-tips.
So let's get back to God. It is not enough
for Him to be. The wild star-radiant stuff
of what He is struggles, is wracked, is torn
like a harp bursting—and a world is born.
Does He in the agony of birth, on the rack
of that adorable suffering stand back
and murmur, " Value, colour, balance, line,"

or when the dawn-gold spur of an Apennine
cleaves chaos, like a sword, red with His blood,
sob to the morning-stars as they sing " It is good "?
Then look at my Gioconda! See how she pinches
her cold clear lips, and count my soul by inches
creeping from corner to corner of her mouth and so
to the cheek, to the eyes, to the hair, and watch it grow
not into a face, (for that were only a trick
of neat additional arithmetic)
but into Leonardo himself, and the life she pinches
between her lips is the life that is Da Vinci's.

That's what Art is—and now enough of talk.
Give me my brush, friend, and that powdered chalk.

II

For in this we are justified—
to set down what we have seen,
and strange voices have cried
strange words between

saying " Beauty," saying " Love,"
not as we know or say them,
and the shadows we are made of
vex and bewray them.

But, like men stemming a crowd,
we hold back the press,
and a little space is allowed
to this loveliness,

that is not ours, nor anyone's,
but in whose service we
make smooth the path that runs
from the sea to the sea.

III

COME! let us write our mortal signature
across the unsubjective world, and claim
that all its temporal attributes endure,
and some are beautiful, because we came.
Or say the moon did never evening lure
with her cold magic till we spoke her name,
nor the great star of the sun was ever sure,
till we saluted him, of his tall flame.
Let us endow the universe, and feel it
slide through the wavering borderlands of sense,
and in the instant of creation seal it
with thought's sign-manual of permanence.
So God, when He had fashioned them, would sign
His Dents du Midi or an Apennine.

I ALSO build, but not with steel nor stone,
but with the shadowy bricks of innocence,
and mortar that the heart has made her own,
and what I build has neither roof nor fence
that can deflect,
with limits or an end, the visionary architect.

This is more than the upward anguish of the spire,
more than the vaulting bridge, that all but flies:
it is the consecration, and the fire
fallen from far: it is the voice that cries,
"Make the way smooth
for the feet of the lord of the world, whose name is youth."

He comes out of the hills from a small town.
He has the sun in his hair and his eyes are lit,
and the thorns of the world are blossoms for his crown,
and I am she who crowns his head with it.
Yes! I have found him
lost in the desert of his heart, and crowned him.

I crown him and I go, but he is hurled
into life's beauty against the plausible gods
of sleek content, and master of the world
establishes his starry periods,
and in his turn
passes, but because of him the living gods return.

Return, and he is lost to me, who freed him,
as I was lost to him, when he was freed,
but since the world will then no longer need him,
I also will absolve him of my need,
when that is done
for which the God in me sent forth his well-belovéd Son.

(Mary, who, having much, had this more given,
who in the dark when all your pains were done
knew that your babe was in Himself the heaven
for which all other women lose their son,
nor they alone,
Mary, who make the future out of their blood and bone.

They make a Saviour, and no Angels hail him.
No gain of all the world consoles their loss.
They set his eyes toward the light, and fail him
because they cannot modify his Cross,
set at the dim
end of the path they traced, but cannot walk with him.)

And yet without my building all were vain.
The airy towers and the terraced slope
of cities are the birthright of my pain,
and the dream I lost and my abandoned hope,
by vision fanned,
are the torch that the runners pass from hand to hand.

I

This I believe:
that if I do not will
the Universe stands still.
I and those of whom I am the part
built it and changed it in our heart,
not out of mud, nor stone, nor seas,
but out of that in which all these
begin, are all, and naught—
the deep desiring thought.

This I believe:
The ape
of which I wear the shape
tumbled in me—his Hell—
a furry archangel,
and, with the only skill he had,
swung with one pitiful blackpad
into the jungle of my will
desiring, till
with a final stroke
he tore his prison-vesture off, and spoke.
He threw aside, because he willed,
the coat that clamped and killed,
and shall he not assume, if he have striven,
when all is done, investiture in heaven?

This I believe:
I am the ape
that God made in His shape,
and who, when he has changed all this,
will at the last refashion God in his.

II

THEY murmur, the children, like bees in summer
in a hot garden, like bees in a cup,
and, like light through branches, now gay, now dimmer,
thought touches a face that is lifted up.
My bees, with the pollen under your feet,
when the thought we shared is no longer alive,
will aught that we dreamed of together be sweet,
will there be honey of ours in the hive?
It is dark in the hive. There is fear, there is shame,
there are tears, and ugliness unto death.
Sweet thieves of the sun, must it still be the same,
or will not the flowers you rifled bequeathe
a glimpse of the vision you saw at my knees,
when the teacher was taught by the Keeper of Bees?

THE SAINT. HE

I

II

THE SAINT. SHE

I

II

HE

Saint Francis of Assisi, do you remember
the sacred mountain, green above the lake,
where first the vines and then the olives clamber,
and the flowers, so lulled with beauty, never wake—
gold, crimson, blue,
on the long drowsy terraces you loved and knew?

Still in the lake the painted island-town
to the brown shelter of its Minster creeps,
and still the kerchiefed boatman, bending down,
scarce stirs the burnished water with his sweeps,
and from the hill
the monastery bells affirm your gospel still.

Your gospel of the birds and of the flowers,
how every petal God has deigned to paint
has by its mere enamel all the powers,
and more than all the beauty of the saint,
and how the swallow
worships with arrow flight that prayer is feign to follow.

Your gospel of acceptance, that transposes
God, and this earthly beauty He has made,
finding the resurrection in the roses
and all the angels in a single blade,
and having heard
the Twelve Apostles in the voice of a bird.

And, as with beauty, so with ugliness
asking the mire, that your feet had trod,
with its long patience to redeem and bless
the soul's impatience, when the feet of God
pass by, as though
He cared not what He crushed, and did not even know.

With ugliness, or what so seemed, and sin
that is no more than beauty's other side,
your gospel, like your Master, entered in
and by acceptance proved, what sin denied,
that wickedness
is part of the soul of God, and calls to Him no less.

You sought no cloister, but with their wild-rose fire
you built of understanding and of pardon
the walls, that shut out envy, hate, desire,
or changed them into flowers in your garden,
since all were part
of the burden of man, and therefore of your heart.

Still in your sacred mountain the cold lances
of the moon ring the target of your mere,
and while one man loves birds and flowers, St. Francis,
you and the company of saints are here,
while one man knows
that all creation is simple as a rose,

fades like a rose, and has the rose's thorn,
but sees behind the fallen petal the bud,
and understands, although his heart is torn,
there was and is salvation in blood,
while anyone
lies down to sleep, accepting everything beneath the sun.

HE

I

THESE are not flowers. They are Adam seeing
the grasses in the empty Garden weave
out of their love the many-coloured being
in which they trembled at the feet of Eve.

These are not flowers. They are Moses breaking
the sullen rock in the desert with his hand.
They are, spring-cooled, the vision re-awaking
of the green pastures in the Promised Land.

These are not flowers. They are Jacob waiting
for Rachel seven years, and, when she came,
finding that April had been hesitating
for seven years to justify her name.

These are not flowers. They are David crying,
"Absalom, Absalom, O, my son, my son!"
They are the echoes down the years replying,
"Absalom, Absalom," softly on and on.

These are not flowers. They are Mary hearing
the promise of the Saviour and His burden.
They are not flowers, but a woman bearing
the rose of heaven in an earthly garden.

These are not flowers. They are God renewing
the Eden that His Adam sacrificed.
They are not flowers. They are heaven wooing
man with the floral benison of Christ.

HE

II

WHERE in the mountains in their shining ranks
the flowers march, it is easy to believe
in the God of flowers, and to give Him thanks
Who wears His floral heart upon His sleeve.
Here, where is harbourage for butterflies,
perfectly matching flowers shade by shade,
till wings appear to sink, and blossoms to rise,
it would be strange if a man had not prayed.
It would be strange here where the bees discover
the pollen that enriches giver and taker,
if man the loved should not accept the Lover,
or in the moment of making refuse the Maker.
And if a flower in her cup can hold Him,
is there not room in the heart of man to fold Him?

SHE

Do you remember, Joan, (O vain to wonder
if you remember how the evening star,
a thousand times you drove the herd home under,
admitted you to vision's Calendar,
like any child
by that tall friendship, and the quiet moon beguiled?)

Do you remember the Dom Rémy you knew,
the plain and the small mountain-range of ricks,
the poplars at their goose-step, two by two,
the brown hen-church that folded her stone-chicks,
your father's farm
so dear, so small it almost fitted in your arm?

Do you remember (even through the flame)
after the long day's labour in the field
how with the Angelus you heard your name
mixed with the bells, and hid your face and kneeled
when sweet and high
a peasant heard "ecce ancilla Domini"?

"Behold the servant of the Lord—and France,"
and in your hands, that never held a sword,
the country staff was lifted like a lance
in the hushed aisles of evening, to the Lord,
and you were gone
for ever, Joan, to put immortal iron on.

What was your sainthood, Joan? You did not guess
when you restored his lilies to your king
that you had found beyond the fleur-de-lys
the lilies in an everlasting spring
whose wind is blown
across the centuries, and is fragrant, Joan.

You were not a proud saint. You went alone
among the soldiers, and you understood
how men are only frightened angels, Joan,
and evil only unprotected good;
you knew these things,
and knew how pardonable are the hearts of kings.

And, being a woman, you lifted mankind up
against the devil in their own despite,
and when they feared, you drank the bitter cup
for all your cowards as by woman's right,
and, even when
you burned, you did not blame them, knowing they
were men.

Saint Joan, it may be all things human must
be dull with earth, and with the darkness faint,
but if it be so, then your mortal dust
was purged with flame till you were all a saint,
and when you prayed
fire spoke to fire, and mixed in heaven, Maid.

SHE

I

THERE is no need to bind the lilies:
she has laid them to her breast.
She has gathered the flowers. As her Father's will is
let us leave her. It is best.

They will not fade where she has set them.
They will not fade and, though
France and the cause she died for should forget them,
God will remember. Let us go.

SHE

II

And the massed English soldiery stood by,
an army of the damned by a devil painted—
steel cap and jerkin—with the crimson dye
of their Hell-fire, in which the Maid was sainted.
So all men with a faggot or a trick
burn the hot vision of youth, and watching it rise
to heaven, are varnished by their heretic
with the great gold of transitory surprise.
But afterwards glows there a single ember,
in the pale inch by its wan candle lit
they find their youth reflected, and remember
how once the world and heaven blazed with it.
And, though nor youth nor vision will return,
with their bright death, the hearts, that burned them,
burn.

THE UNCOMMON MAN
I
II
THE UNCOMMON WOMAN
I
II

GREATNESS? But by what measure do you mete—
By what I did, or what I sought and lost,
by the hot whisper of the roaring street,
or the cold lips of the unapproving ghost,
that slides between
the little thing I am and what I might have been?

There have been men that have surpassed their fate,
finding a star in the mud. These in the things
they could have had and left unclaimed were great,
these in the kingdoms they refused were kings.
These, plunging deep
into the dreams' bright origins, found dreams to keep.

Vision! as snowflakes, silver in the night,
stain the dark air, or a star's coloured dust
paints the pale heavens with the source of light,
so vision, beauty's unassuageable lust
for the unattained,
abides with the chosen, gold, as a star had stained.

And greatness is the vision, not the deed.
Greatness is to be one with the vision, and ensue it,
greatness is suffering, greatness a long need,
and distant bugles crying faintly through it,
"Lights out! Lights out!"
Greatness is to hear the bugles and not to doubt.

But loud these bugles for the doer cry,
and the sound of his longing for beauty is dim,
as note after note ascends his evening sky,
stealing the ancient stars and the moon from him,
to range instead
the frozen constellations of the vision fled.

And the great man's greatness marches by his side,
fainter with the rising bugles on the air,
as though the whole world were a voice that cried,
" To-day and here, not then nor over there,"
and no great lily
of the trump of vision at dawn will sound réveillé.

And thus the uncommon man is Lucifer
falling in his own heart, so hidden at birth
with the great wings of vision, so far from her
wandered with the green laurels of the earth,
so standing, crowned
by men, hears the wings pass until there is no sound.

" These lost the world. These are lost archangels."
Whence came these words? Not in my mind they rose,
but strangely stirred, as though green-brazen bells
were rubbed by fingers, lighter than the snows,
so faint with such
far cry of bronze beneath a cold and feathery touch.

Who are the losers of the world? Not those
millions, whose spark is blown upon the wind,
to make one petal of the fiery rose
which they, who nurse their flame, can never find,
not those who spend,
and lay their beauty down for their unknown friend.

Who are the lost archangels? Not the gentle
who are as rich as the blades of grass, that stand
content to be one thread in the green mantle
in which spring enters on Broceliande,
not those who give
their lives that greater lives than theirs may live.

We lose the world. We are lost archangels,
who take their gift, and, taking, lose our own,
we the magicians weaker than our spells,
the lesser sculptors than the patient stone,
we, who by this
are given all loveliness to fashion, and to miss.

We lose the world. And yet, in losing, see
by their lost sight, feel by their wasted touch,
and find the face of God bewilderingly,
because these others loved their dream too much,
because we love it
too little, and through them become the meaning of it.

We are the losers of the world, and we have it.
We are the lost archangels, and we rise.
We have cheated the faith they had, and they forgave
it,
blind, and we see behind their darkened eyes.
Died, and instead
are the life eternal for which all these are dead.

THE UNCOMMON MAN

I

THE FEATHERS in a fan
are not so frail as man;
the green embosséd leaf
than man is no more brief.
His life is not so loud
as the passing of a cloud;
his death is quieter
than harebells, when they stir.
The years that have no form
and substance are as warm,
and space has hardly less
supreme an emptiness.
And yet man being frail
does on himself prevail,
and with a single thought
can bring the world to naught,
as being brief he still
bends to his fleeting will
all time, and makes of it
the shadow of his wit.
Soundless in life and death
although he vanisheth,
the echo of a song
makes all the stars a gong.
Cold, void, and yet the grim
darkness is hot with him,
and space is but the span
of the long love of man.

II

THE CROSS was but the iron clamps that hold
the shutter at a window. Slip the bars
and, with a rush, come flooding in, all gold,
the tides of day, or evening with her stars.
But say He had not touched the shutter, say
He'd waited in the darkness patiently,
and suffered all life long, day after day,
his slow habitual Gethsemane.
God, the old Pharaoh, obstinate and blind,
rubbed by that gradual proof of all men's woe,
might at the last have understood mankind,
and for His own sake let His people go,
and the Crucified become the Crucifying,
if Christ had lived for men instead of dying.

THE UNCOMMON WOMAN

I LEAN back through the dark forest of my race,
and all the floor is heaped with delicate ash
of leaf and blossom, and husk too small to trace—
all that is left of man's imperious flesh
made manifest
in battle, love, and the journey to the Islands of the West.

Not his these scented ashes, this bland air,
but Nature's only, muttering in her sleep,
"Let life go on," and does not know nor care
if all who live are foundered fathoms deep,
like sinking wrack
changing from gold to green, from green to unimagined black.

Old wars, the desperate bid for life by dying,
mix with dust Edens long ago forgotten,
and here Gethsemanes in ash are lying
browner than last year's leaves, as those leaves rotten,
all nature's tricks—
even the last sweet treachery of a Crucifix.

But woman has a secret that resists
the magic of the half-gods, as they wind
their spells with slow, but surely wearying, wrists,
woman has a secret not all their webs can bind—
the little Powers
weaving for their own necks these sacrificial flowers.

What is our secret, Eve? When the coiled snake
tempts us with knowledge, and we whisper "Yes"?
What is our secret, Mary? When they take
our dream and crucify it? and no less
we must outdream
the serpent-trick of knowledge, and man's blind
stratagem?

What is the secret of women, that jettison
the Edens that they have for spectral gleams
of impossible Edens always further on?
Who offer up the child Jesus of their dreams
to the sharp nails,
that hammer into Hell the broken dream that fails?

What is their secret? Woman is older than man,
and is not cheated by the manifold pretence
of life that has no purpose and no plan,
wooing with spring and flowers and trees the sense
of those, who should
look into darkness in cold undecorated solitude.

Woman, that bears, has a higher fate than bearing.
Woman, that gives, outlasts both giving and taking.
Woman, that loves, outloves the need of caring.
Woman, that dies, is moulding death, forsaking
life's fleeting guesses
for the rich dark, and sempiternal lovelinesses.

She is the labyrinth that man has trod
led by the tapes of love the conjurer,
who in that guidance dreams himself a god,
and does not guess that in the heart of her
he is no more
than, gazing over seas unknown, the Minotaur.

She is the constant in the bewildering flow
of numbers, written in chalk on death's long slate,
to which death has the key, but does not know
how that one figure, stronger far than fate,
will crash the sum
in the gold total of her proud Kingdom Come.

And the Uncommon Woman, whatever shape
man's wandering fancy gives her, Ashtaroth,
Psyche, or Eve or Mary, cannot escape
from that in men and women, transcending both
the primal trust,
to which she is appointed, of the patient dust,

twisted and battered, suffering and torn,
but clamouring ever through its shapeless mouth
for sheerer peaks than thought's last Matterhorn,
for swallow-flights past beauty's furthest South,
for that which must
be the whole meaning of dust, because it is not dust.

To that all women are pledged, and do not know it,
and I, the uncommon woman, who dimly see
that we are the first conjecture of a poet,
one line in an unconcerted harmony,
I will not falter,
myself the flame, I shall not see, upon the unseen
altar.

I

When the ancient ape and fish
mould man's spirit to their wish,
when the battle in the brain,
fought and won, is lost again,
when in fear or hate or rage
man disowns his heritage,
when the heart's imagining
plucks the angel by the wing,
and at the first defiling touch
the great white pinions wheel and clutch,
clutch and wheel, and with one great
impulse leave man desolate,
what remains? What prayer, what priest
can stay the empire of the beast?
What new legions can be hurled
into the breach to save the world?
But stay! a lantern in the dark,
and in the night a bugle, hark!
Have hope, my spirit! There appears
down the dark victorious years,
where man has fallen, cool and slim,
the captain God aneled for him.
Her beauty is the clarion
of the new armies sweeping on,
the trumpet-note whose echoes spill
from darkened hill to darkened hill.
And where the broken hosts have reeled
she lifts her courage like a shield,
lifts up her laughter like a sword,
and flings them back, released, restored,
bursting the ultimate night apart
with the artillery of her heart,
and, where the scattered clouds were piled,
bearing the morning, like a child.

II

I AM the spring of tree and flower and beast,
in man's wild blood my settled pulses stir,
and, while his sun still modifies the East
with his blonde torch, I am his prisoner.
But tree and flower and beast are only a name
for man's brief dreams, and even the sun is naught,
with all his lenient planets, but a flame
that blazes, and will perish, in a thought.
And till these pass, the secret in me trembles,
waiting its hour, and still I keep between
the half-seen truth, of which all these are symbols,
and the whole truth, where sight is one with seen,
where even love lays by man's last pretence
of consummation in difference.

LOSERS AND WINNERS

LOSERS AND WINNERS

I. THE LOSERS

We lost the world. We are lost archangels
and time abandons us, and we become
the silence in heaven when no organ swells
between the stars, and even the moon is dumb—
we sons and daughters
of light are darkness on the face of the waters,

dark with the flame, whose plume is black in Hell,
at which the angels of despair are lit,
Lucifer, who fell with Adam, and Azrael,
and, deeply burning in the heart of it,
how can they save
when our pale spirits call them from a nameless grave?

We lost the world. We are not even weary,
passing beyond despair and comfort both,
and, if our hands are spoiled, could you, pale Mary,
restore them, or our hearts, you, Ashtaroth?
Can you not save,
Mary and Ashtaroth, nor hear us in the grave?

We rose like archangels, and afterward
through cycle after flaming epicycle
in the doomed armies lift a broken sword
to share that doom, but you remember, Michael,
that, if they name us,
we, dying, raise the "morituri salutamus,"

and that long cry, if even our names are lost,
may echo through the frozen festival,
where what we might have been—a silent host
of cold spectators—sees us fight and fall,
but if we come,
their own ghosts crying, who will dare to turn the thumb?

We lost the world, soldier and prostitute,
the common man and woman of despair,
who play on life as on a ruined flute
when nothing but the will to play is there,
and our poor breath
has only the two stops, false life and falser death.

We are lost archangels. You, Magdalene,
since you, like us, the source of life had marred
in death's dull cause, had it not better been
rather these heads to anoint with spikenard,
these bent, these grey,
for whom there are no angels to roll the stone away?

For whom there is no archangel to plead
in heaven, or advance their case in hell,
who buy from Lucifer with bitter need
oblivion in the dark of Azrael,
and who must sell,
hucksters, the freedom for which the angels fell?

Is there no archangel, no spirit lief
to save the huckster that all men may be?
None? But, bright choir, there was once a thief

who found his archangel on Calvary—
a thief who won
by his acceptance the life rejected by the nun,

the cloistered nun who laid the world aside
before the world had spoken, and no less
in all of us is man's unsatisfied
desire for more than human holiness
in the heart spared
(Who knows?) because of the agony of love it shared.

The unknown love to which we sacrificed,
destroying other gods, and clove to this,
an older Mithras and a darker Christ,
and yet betrayed him with the Judas-kiss
to those who saw
through lawlessness only the cold avenging law,

who would not see that to defy the rule,
though it destroy the law, builds it anew
out of rebellion more beautiful
than the old law that custom made untrue,
who sacrificed
for that bleak satisfaction even Christ.

And therefore, Archangels, since you are jealous
guardians in heaven of the source of love,
lean down from your high sanctuary and tell us,
while still upon our souls the shadows move,
we shall not starve
in heaven, on earth who only stand and serve.

We lost the world. Fall with us, Lucifer!
Cover us with your darkness, Azrael!
We are lost archangels. Then cry to her,
to Mary, with your trumpeters in Hell,
Michael, and say,
" But these have found the world, who laid the world away."

And Mary Mother, to whom this much was given,
dream like the rest, and, like the rest, outdreaming
this dream of life, remember these in heaven,
and in that world where there's an end of seeming,
for all these dead,
Mary, be comfortable for the uncomforted.

II. THE WINNERS

We won the world. We are the victors! Yes,
all that it has to offer, we shall use it—
love, power, beauty, wisdom, holiness,
we have the world, and having it must lose it,
for only thus
can He, Who made us to conquer, with pity conquer us.

And Love is Lucifer and Azrael,
Mary, who, having much, had this more given.
Michael and Mary Magdalene of Hell
building with separate agonies the heaven,
cool, fair and far,
that rises steadily in a single star,

seen from the abyss of life, where fear and hate
through loss, and suffering, and faith reclaim
the love their failure proves, and consecrate
the tossing veils of vision with the same
beauty that died,
and rose again, when the world's heart was crucified.

The same that all must know, when the wings beating
draw up the heart, that saw in a glass darkly
into an alien star to the last meeting,
when between wings the wingless heart sees starkly,
in the disgrace
of love that falls so short of Him, God face to face.

Love, that falls short, even the love creating
the figment of His beauty in the soul,
where beast and angel each on other waiting
are, though divided, thus for ever whole,
and each in each
grope back to the jungle, and up to heaven reach.

As all who teach, building with human stuff
as the builder with the earth, can never rest
nor find the beauty they fashion is enough
beside the one unfashionable best,
whose golden strands
escape their hands for ever, and are not made with hands.

They mould a Saviour, but they cannot save him,
nor save themselves by his star-fated loss,
and life does not forgive though they forgave him,

manhood's surrender weeping on the Cross,
" Why did you waken me
to light, if thus in dark you have forsaken me? "

Nor even the Saints of victory claim more
than to endure defeat without complaint,
and the failure of the crowns they battled for,
and not the crowns they gathered, seal the saint,
for the heart knows
that the secret of sainthood is complex as the rose,

plotted in long conspiracy of pain,
moulded with the moon, and with the sun's gold hands,
whispered by snow, and hinted at by rain,
guessed in wild forests in forgotten lands,
in leaves, like a devil,
and flowers like angry flames that predicated evil,

until a poet by some half-fabled city,
under the moon on turrets fairy-pale,
saw, with the anguish of love that melts to pity
for all perfection that is born to fail,
in darkness climb
the first consummate rose from beauty into time.

And sainthood is as old as the rose and as rich
with history of anguish, and the thorn
of Time bewildering the hush, in which
the flower of eternity is born,
and the dark advances
where you are burning, Joan, and where you pray, St. Francis.

And yet, dear Saints, if all things mortal must
be dull with earth, and with the darkness faint,
mortality is canonized with dust,
and the dark it suffers anoints the heart a saint,
and man's desire
failing in heaven is fire that speaks to fire.

Thus lovers, Builder, teacher, and the Saint,
the uncommon man and woman, glory gain
to find their little victories grow faint,
and all their battles to be fought again,
and never can
do more than prove for the common woman and man,

that woman, who bears, has a higher fate than bearing,
woman, that gives, outlasts both giving and taking,
woman, that loves, outloves the need of caring,
and woman, that fails, is of her failure making
the only guess
of our brief hearts at sempiternal loveliness,

that these are the losers of the world, and they have it,
they are the lost archangels, and they rise,
they have cheated the faith they had, and God forgave it,
are blind and see in His forgiving eyes,
and, having died,
of life eternal are the bridegroom and the bride.

CODA

THE HIGH SONG

THE HIGH song is over. Silent is the lute now.
They are crowned for ever and discrowned now.
Whether they triumphed or suffered they are mute now,
or at the most they are only a sound now.

The high song is over. There is none to complain now.
No heart for healing, and none to break now.
They have gone, and they will not come again now.
They are sleeping at last, and they will not wake now.

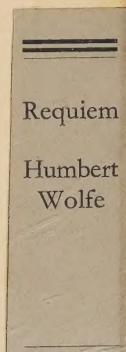
The high song is over. And we shall not mourn now.
There was a thing to say, and it is said now.
It is as though all these had been unborn now,
it is as though the world itself were dead now.

The high song is over. Even the echoes fail now;
winners and losers—they are only a theme now,
their victory and defeat a half-forgotten tale now;
and even the angels are only a dream now.

There is no need for blame, no cause for praise now.
Nothing to hide, to change or to discover.
They were men and women. They have gone their ways now,
as men and women must. The high song is over.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

R. Clay & Sons, Ltd., Bungay, Suffolk.


Requiem
Humbert
Wolfe